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"Let the people rule": speech of Hon. Stephen
at Concord, New Hampshire, July 31, 1860. [S1.



"LET THE PEOPLE RULE."

SPEECH

OF

HON. STEPHEN A. DOUGLAS,

AT CONCORD, NEW HAMPSHIRE,

JULY 31, 1860.

Mr. Chairman and Fellow Citizens of New Hampshire,—You will receive my grateful thanks for the kind terms in which you have been pleased to welcome me; and you will accept my grateful acknowledgments for the cordiality with which you have endorsed those sentiments of welcome. For the first time I visit the capital of your noble State. When I wanted to make a brief trip through Vermont and New Hampshire, on my way from Saratoga to Newport, R. I., I did not expect any public demonstration. My object was to make a quiet visit, a pilgrimage to the grave of my father and to the scenes of my childhood.—From the moment I trod the soil of Vermont, I found I was welcomed by the population *en masse*. Men of all parties joined in the reception. It filled my heart with gratitude, and rendered it impossible for me to discuss any of those political topics about which the assemblage differed in opinion. I had supposed that when I left the borders of my native State, I would be welcomed only by a few friends, as I passed along the road. Imagine my surprise at this vast assemblage, this imposing reception, which exceeds in its magnificence and grandeur anything I have previously witnessed. From the bottom of my heart I thank you for this demonstration of your good will.

You have been pleased, Mr. Chairman, to refer in terms of approbation to my course upon the Lecompton Constitution. While I have ceased to discuss the merits of that question since it was finally discarded by the people of Kansas, yet I will not refrain from a slight allusion to it now, lest my silence might be misconstrued. I did fight that Lecompton Constitution with all the energy and with all the power that I could command. Reluctant as I was to differ in opinion or action with a President whom I had used all my efforts to place in the executive chair, yet duty was paramount to any personal or party obligation. I stood pledged, as every Democrat in America stood pledged by his vote for James Buchanan, in 1856, to maintain the right of the people of every State and every Territory to form and regulate their own domestic institutions. ("That's it.") In my opinion, the attempt to force upon an unwilling people a Constitution which they did not like, was not only in violation of the Democratic creed, but it violated the American creed. It violated the Republican creed. It violated the creed of all free men, in all free countries. (Applause.) I did not oppose the Lecompton Constitution on the ground of its provisions in respect to African slavery. I held then, as I hold now, that if the people of Kansas wanted a slave State, they had a right to it. If, on the contrary, they did not want slavery, no power on earth should force it upon them. I opposed the Lecompton Constitution because it was not the act and deed of the people of Kansas. I proposed that the question should be referred back to the people of Kansas, with the privilege of voting for it or against it; and if a majority of all the legal voters of Kansas ratified it, then Kansas should come into the Union with that Constitution. If, on the contrary, a majority

voted against it, the people of Kansas might proceed to make a new Constitution, with or without slavery, just as they pleased, and come into the Union. I rejoiced from the bottom of my heart when I saw every Republican in both Houses of Congress voting for that proposition. Having heard the Republican party pledge themselves so often against the admission of any more slave States into the Union, it did rejoice me when I saw them, every man in the Senate, and every man in the House, voting to allow Kansas to come in as a slave State, if the people should so decide. And I will say to you now, my fellow citizens, that it is a matter of sincere regret that I find the Republican party now denouncing me for advocating the identical principle that they then voted for. All I ask of them is to carry out in future, and apply to every new Territory and new State, the identical principles for which they all voted with me in that Lecompton controversy. (Cheers.) The President of the United States, during that Lecompton controversy, put forth a claim which I, as a Senator, could not recognize. I conceded his right to recommend the Lecompton Constitution if he believed it to be the act and deed of the people, and I should never have quarreled with him on that question had he not claimed the right to control my vote and compel me to vote against my conscience. I hold that a President has no more right to control the vote of a Senator, than a Senator has to dictate to a President. The President told me that if I did not obey him and vote to force the Lecompton Constitution upon the people against their will, he would take off the head of every friend I had in office. I told him in reply that my friends were as dear to me as those of any other man could be to him, but that if I had a friend who was not willing to lose his office rather than degrade me into a tool of executive power, he did not deserve to be my friend. Here permit me to say, that the great contest between the executive and myself was this: he claimed the right to control the vote of a Senator in opposition to the wishes of his constituents. I claimed that the representative of the people is independent and should always act independent of executive power. When you permit the executive to direct a representative how he shall vote, you convert this republic into a despotism. Why elect a Congress, if the President has a right to tell the members how they are to vote? There is an end of representative government, whenever the executive is permitted to use or abuse his power by controlling the action of the representative against the wishes of his constituents and of his individual conscience.

Hence, in my opinion, I was fighting a greater battle in Illinois in 1858 than the mere question who should be Senator. In my person the question was submitted to the people of Illinois, whether or not their Senator should be the mere tool of executive dictation. ("They decided it right!") Yes, they did decide it right, in opposition to an unholy alliance between the Republicans and the Federal office holders.

It was hoped when that Lecompton controversy had been settled by the vote of the people of Kansas against it, that the warfare in the Democratic party would cease. But instead of that, the war was kept up; and now we find on the national theatre the same game being played that was attempted in Illinois in 1858. Now you find the question submitted whether or not the executive of this nation is to be permitted to dictate his successor in office. It is said that Mr. Buchanan naturally feels mortified and wounded to have a man nominated by his own party in opposition to his wishes. Whether he thus feels mortified or not, it would have been well for him to have considered when he became a candidate in 1856 in opposition to General Pierce, who was then President and a candidate for re-election. It is true that I was nominated in opposition to the wishes of the President. It is also true that Mr. Buchanan was nominated in 1856 in opposition to the then President, who was a candidate for re-election. Suppose General Pierce had then pursued the same course which Mr. Buchanan is now pursuing,—that is, using the power and patronage which the Democratic party had placed in his hands, for the purpose of defeating the nominee of that party. What would every Democrat in America have said of Franklin Pierce if he had tried to divide and defeat his party merely out of mortification and chagrin at not getting the re-nomination?—Whatever would have been said of Gen. Pierce in such a contingency, must be true of James Buchanan now.

I should not have referred to these things at this time, nor during this canvass, but for the fact that the President of the United States has taken the stump, making public harangues for the purpose of dividing and defeating the party that elected him President. What are the reasons assigned by the President for endeavoring to divide and break down the Democratic party? He does not assign the personal reason that he don't like the nominee. But he puts it upon the ground that he don't like the platform adopted by the party. What is there in that platform to which James Buchanan has a right to take exception? It is the identical platform upon which James Buchanan was elected President, and without which he never could have been elected. There isn't an honest man in all America that will deny that James Buchanan and John C. Breckinridge, in 1856, were pledged to the doctrine of non-intervention by Congress with slavery in the territories. I made speeches from the same stand with John C. Breckinridge in 1856, when he was advocating his own claims to the Vice-Presidency, and heard him go to the extreme lengths in favor of popular sovereignty in the territories.

Then again, if I recollect right, the Demo-

crats of New Hampshire held an immense mass meeting at this capital, in Feb'y, 1856, previous to the nomination at Cincinnati, at which Howell Cobb and Joseph Lane and James L. Orr of South Carolina, made speeches; and in every one of those speeches they advocated squatter sovereignty in its broadest sense.—I appeal to this audience if these facts are not true. They were written out by the speakers after they returned to Washington, and published in pamphlet form by the National Democratic Committee, as a true exposition of Democratic principle, and I believe in every Democratic paper in America that had the space to spare for political speeches.

In other words, fellow-citizens, I stand now where every Democrat in America stood four years ago, advocating the right of the people of every political community to make their own laws, to establish their own institutions to suit themselves. I claim no peculiar credit for advocating these principles. That principle of popular sovereignty is as old as free government itself. It was the principle upon which every battle of the Revolution was fought.—Remember, for one moment, what was the cause that led to the revolutionary war.—What was the demand of our revolutionary fathers, the denial of which produced the war? It was not independence. In the beginning of that controversy our revolutionary fathers did not desire independence. In every petition to the Crown, in every address to the Parliament and people of England, our fathers set up and protested their devotion to the British Constitution, and their loyalty to the Crown of England. Then what were our fathers contending for, if it was not independence? They were contending for the right of self-government in the colonies. They demanded the right in their own local legislatures to pass all laws which affected the local and domestic concerns of their respective colonies.—They did not deny the right of the British Parliament to pass laws on all subjects which were imperial and not colonial.—They did not deny the right of the British Government to do all acts and things which affected the general welfare of the empire without interfering with the local and domestic concerns of the people of the colonies. But they demanded the right of self-government in each colony in respect to every thing that was local and internal, and not imperial. And our fathers put forth the Declaration of Independence only when they found they could not get local self-government without it. They submitted to independence as a necessity, in order to get local self-government. They established the independence of these colonies only as a means of acquiring the rights of local self-government. Thus you find that the revolutionary war is justified only upon the ground that the people of the Colonies had a right to govern themselves in their local matters without the interference of the British Parliament.

We are now told by the republicans of the North, and by the disunionists of the South, that the principle of non-intervention and popular sovereignty is very well in the States, but is all wrong in the Territories. They tell us that a Territory is not sovereign, and therefore has no right to exercise a sovereign power or establish its own institutions. Let me ask them if the colonies were sovereign when our fathers demanded the same right of self-government? Our fathers demanded this privilege not for sovereign States but for dependent colonies, for provinces, for territories, while they were dependent and remaining in a colonial and territorial condition. Our fathers demanded this privilege under precisely the same circumstances that we Democrats now claim it for the people of the Territories.

We Democrats acknowledge the right and duty of Congress to pass all laws which are federal, and not local or territorial in their character. We don't deny the right of Congress to regulate commerce with foreign nations, to make war, to collect revenue, to perform those general acts which are federal, and not local, in their character. But we demand that the people of a territory, the same as those of a colony, shall be permitted to make their own laws and establish their own institutions to suit themselves. (Applause.) The Republicans of New Hampshire will tell you that the people of the territory have no right of self-government, until they become a State. Have no right! Why not? Because, they say, Congress has not given them that right. I have yet to learn that an American freeman, whether in a State or a territory, derives his rights from Congress. I am aware that the Tories of the Revolution took the ground that the people of these colonies had no rights except those which the King of England granted to them in their charters. And they said that inasmuch as the colonies obtained their rights from the Crown, why, of course, the King could take them away whenever he thought proper. What did Washington, and Jefferson, and Hancock, and Warren, and Molly Stark say to that doctrine? (Laughter and cheers.) They told the King of England and the British Parliament, that they did not get their rights from the Crown, and hence that the Crown could not take them away. They told the King of England that they obtained their rights from God Almighty, and that He alone could take them away. The doctrine of the revolutionary war was, that the right of local government was inherent in the people; and that hence all rightful government must emanate from the people, and be established by and for the benefit of the people. That was the doctrine in the times of the Revolution. But we are now told that this inherent right of self government only pertains to States—don't belong to territories, nor colonies, nor provinces, as it did in 1776. Let us examine this claim for a moment.

I suppose that you, citizens of New Hampshire, without distinction of party, all claim the inherent right of self-government. ("Yes,

yes.") You think it is an inherent right that no power on earth dare take from you. Well, I suppose that Democrats and Republicans agree so far. But the Republican tells you that the moment a citizen of New Hampshire, (who possesses the inherent right of self-government so long as he stays here) crosses a State line and enters a territory of the United States, he forfeits the right. Is it true that a citizen of New Hampshire forfeits his inalienable right of self-government when he moves to a territory? What provision of the Constitution of the United States works that forfeiture? ("None.") Then upon what ground is it that an American citizen is deprived of his rights when he goes into a territory under the Constitution and the American flag? Will it be said that the people of the territories are not capable of self-government? Who are the people of the territories? Where did they come from? Many of them are your sons, your brothers, who left the granite hills of their native State and went to Kansas. They were capable of self-government, were they not, when they left home? When did they lose their capacity to govern themselves? Were they any less capable of self-government after they got to Kansas than they were when they started? Did they lose all their sense and intelligence, and the virtue they possessed, while on the ferry boat crossing the Missouri river? Where and when, I ask, did the native-born citizen who was capable of self-government when he started, lose that capacity? I will not pretend to say what may be the opinion of the people of New Hampshire as to the capacity of the people of the territories and of the new State, to govern themselves. I will only say that we who have spent a whole manhood on the frontier, do think that we are capable of self government. We will never admit that you are any wiser, better, or more capable of self-government than ourselves. We have a great respect for you of the old States. I think we love you better than you do us. And I will give you good reasons for it. I am a native of New England, and I left the land of my birth, the scenes of my childhood, the grave of my fathers, and went to the extreme Northwest. And yet New England is my native land, and I love her on that account. Illinois is not your native land, and you don't love her therefore as much as I do, who live there. Hence I say to you that the people of the Northwest who emigrate from New England, from Virginia, from the Carolinas, from any of the old States, remain loyal in their affections to the States from which they removed, while they love still dearer the States where they have planted their wives and children. Yet we think we are just as capable of self-government after we get out there as we were before we started. With all due respect, we think we are quite as competent as you are; and I will give you a reason for that. I think the New Hampshire boy who moves to the West when he is twenty years of age, is just as capable of self-government as the brother that remains behind.

Just cast your eyes round this neighborhood, and find an old gentleman who had two sons. The one was an ambitious, restless, energetic, daring boy. The other was an amiable, kind, lazy, good fellow. (Laughter.) Which of these boys do you think went out West? Which stayed at home, and lived with daddy and mammy? (Laughter.) The bold and ambitious young fellow went and dug up the prairie; or in the wilderness he carved out his own fortune, made his own farm, put up his own fences, and perhaps split his own rails. (Laughter and cheers.) He cultivated his own fields, erected a school-house and a church,—yes, and made his own cabinet-work too. By that time I reckon the wild boy had sown his wild oats pretty well, and was fully as capable of self-government as the one that stayed here and acted under father's and mother's advice. And what more? Very likely that young fellow, after he had made a home for himself in the West, found himself a little lonesome and concluded to come back and see the old people. If he did, ten to one that he put his eye on the prettiest girl that could be found in the neighborhood, and took her out West with him,—thus taking away from the old New England State not only the smartest boy but also the prettiest girl in the district. (Laughter and cheers.) Now, are you going to tell me that such people are not capable of self government, merely because they live in a Territory? ("Not we.") I hold that every political community, State and Territory alike, has, under our system of government, the right to govern itself in all things that are local and domestic, and not federal. And, what is more,—Mr. Buchanan thought so in 1856; Mr. Breckinridge thought so in 1856. The republicans all thought so when they voted for the Crittenden bill in the Lecompton controversy. The Democratic party thinks so now. (Applause.) This principle of popular sovereignty and non-intervention is a cardinal plank in the Democratic platform. Every Democrat has heretofore declared and considered it a fundamental article of his creed.

But here I must be just to other parties. We Democrats are not entitled to the exclusive claim and exclusive credit of this doctrine of non-intervention and popular sovereignty. In 1852, it was adopted as a plank in the Whig platform. Clay and Webster established it in the Compromise measures of 1850. General Pierce was nominated upon it in 1852, and elected upon it. I remember well that in the contest between Pierce and Scott, in 1852, the whole controversy was which party was entitled to the most credit in the adoption of the Compromise measures of 1850. The Whigs were in the habit of claiming the exclusive credit, because their great leader, Henry Clay, was the author of the measure, because their godlike Webster made the argument to vindicate the measure, and because their model President, Fillmore, approved the bill after Congress had passed it. On the other hand, I

was in the habit of denying that the Whigs were entitled to all the credit, or to more than half of it, for the reason that while I admitted that the Whig party furnished the General that commanded the army, we Democrats furnished a majority of the soldiers that gave the votes and passed the measures through Congress.

But it cannot be denied that both the Whig and Democratic party, in 1852, stood pledged by the platform to this principle of non-intervention by Congress with slavery in the Territories of the United States. Will any man deny the truth of these facts? ("No.") How then does it happen that so many old Whigs, so many old Democrats, have strayed away from the path where both parties used to tread in peace and harmony? Whigs and Democrats were in the habit of quarreling about the distribution of the public funds, and the specie circular; but at the same time they were agreed on the slavery question. Non-intervention was a plank common to both parties. You Whigs agreed to stand by that, and so did we Democrats. I want to know whether you, old Whigs, are going to jump off the only plank remaining in the platform, merely because you find me standing on it? I give you fair notice that I never intend to abandon it, if I find every Whig in America on it. (Laughter and cheers.)

So it was with the American party in 1856. You Americans and we Democrats differed about other matters, but agreed on non-intervention. Remember the twelfth article in that celebrated American creed, in which you "pretermitted" the slavery question. "Pretermit" was the word used. Now I want to know if you are not willing to pretermit it now? Pretermitting, I reckon, is about the same as non-interference.

Let every old line Whig, every Democrat, every American, every conservative man, rally on this principle of non-interference by the federal government with slavery in the territories, and you will have peace and harmony all over this land. Remember there has never been sectional strife in this country except when the federal government attempted to take power over the local and domestic institutions of the people. So long as Congress has confined its acts to those few objects specified in the Constitution as being federal, and not local, there has been peace. But now you find this country threatened with sectional strife, and why? Because you are now realizing what the Father of his country in his farewell address cautioned his countrymen against. You now find this country divided into two sectional parties, one north and another south. The Republican party appeal to passions, prejudices, and the ambition of the north against the South and her institutions. Secessionists of the South appeal to passions, prejudices, and to the ambition of the Southern people against the North and our institutions. The republicans demand that the federal government shall take charge of the slavery question. The Southern secessionists also demand that the federal government shall settle that question. The Republicans want the federal government to wield its power against slavery everywhere. And the secessionists want the federal force wielded for slavery everwhere. Thus you find an irrepressible conflict produced between those two sectional parties. The one is the antipodes to the other; and yet the one is necessary to the existence of the other. The Republicans of the north and the Secessionists of the south occupy precisely the same relation to each other as the two blades of a pair of shears.—They both turn on the same pivot, but cut in opposite directions. Interference by Congress with slavery in the Territories is the pivot on which both turn. The Republicans tell us that Congress must prohibit slavery wherever the people want slavery — no matter about prohibiting it where the people don't want it. They prohibit it themselves. Hence the Republicans want Congress to prohibit slavery whenever and wherever the people want to have it. The Secessionists of the South, on the other hand, demand that Congress shall maintain and protect slavery wherever the people don't want it. They say they are going to have it protected by Congress wherever necessary, and that it is not necessary, so long as the people want it, for if they want it they will protect it themselves. It is only necessary when the people don't want it, and that is the only time they are going to interfere to protect it.

Thus, both of those parties rest their respective claims on the doctrine of intervention by Congress with slavery in the Territories, in opposition to the right of the people in all cases. The Democratic party, on the other hand, proclaim the doctrine of non-interference by Congress with the domestic institutions of the people every where. (Applause.) We say to the federal government, "Hands off! Touch not the local affairs of the people!" We say to the federal government, what our fathers said to the British Parliament, "Mind your own business." ("That's right.")

Passing through Vergennes the other day, a gentleman in the cars called my attention to an old piece of Continental money. "Did you ever mind those words—'Mind your own business.'" Another gentleman in the cars called my attention to an old Massachusetts coin, on the reverse side of which was, "Mind your own business." That was the creed of our fathers in the Revolution. That was what they said to the British Parliament, when they attempted to force slavery on the colony of Virginia, against its will. That is what our fathers said to the British government, when it attempted to control our people in their local and domestic affairs, and to dictate what kind of paper they should write on. Our fathers said to the British government, "Hands off! Mind your own business!" And in order that they might perpetuate that motto, and render it familiar to their children, they placed it upon their paper

money and on their coin, in order that every child should learn to read it. Let us now act on that principle. Let us say to Congress, "Mind your own business, and let the Territories alone!"

I have a word more to say to you, and then I have done. I presume that many of you have business before Congress of some kind or other. Perhaps one of you has a claim for a pension. If so, ask your representative, when he comes home, what became of your bill.—He'll tell you that he did the best he could for you, but that it was lost for want of time.—"Why lost for the want of time?" "Oh, Congress occupied the whole time in discussing the slavery question, and there was no time to pass your pension bill." Another may have an interest in the French Spoliation bill. Ask your representative what became of that bill. "Lost for want of time; slavery question occupies the whole time—no chance for anything else." Ask your representatives why they did not remodel the tariff in order to raise money enough to defray the expenses of the government without borrowing twenty millions of dollars a year. They will tell you, the only reason that the bill was lost was for want of time. The negro question occupies the whole time; no chance for the tariff. Ask them why they did not pass a Pacific Railroad bill; and at the same time remind them that Fillmore was pledged to a Pacific railroad when a candidate, in 1856, and Fremont was pledged to it, and Buchanan was pledged to it,—all three parties pledged to it. Yet the very bill, the very measure to which all parties were pledged, could not get a majority in either house of Congress. Ask your representatives—Why? "Lost for the want of time; the negro question takes up all the time, and there is no time left to attend to the material interests of the country"—at least to the interests of the white folks, as my friend in the crowd says. In my opinion, the government of this country is the white man's government. It was made by white men for the benefit of white men, and ought to be administered by white men.—And I think the white men have a right to a small portion of the time, at least, so that their business may be attended to.

You never will have appropriate legislation on any of these questions before Congress—and I am not discussing the question as to what the legislation ought to be—but you never will have the subjects considered and acted upon until you banish the negro question from the halls of Congress. Let us banish that question from Congress forever. Remand it to the people of the Territories who are interested in it. Let them do as they please, subject to the Constitution of the United States, and there will be no cause of controversy between the North and the South. Maintain the doctrine of non-intervention and there will be peace and harmony between all sections of the country. Why can we not now live in peace as we did in former times? You will all remember that during the Revolution the Northern army was commanded by a Southern general, and the Southern army by a Northern general; and on the battle field Southern and Northern men fought shoulder by shoulder in a common cause, poured out their blood in a common battle in order that they might transmit a common inheritance to their children. Why can we not live together now as we did then in the bonds of peace and fraternity? These questions come home to us in the Northwest with more force than they do to you even. Go into the plains of Illinois, and there you will find the Yankee boy with a Southern wife, the Yankee girl with a Southern husband. When their children have grown up and have gone to visit the graves of their fathers or their mothers, or the graves of their ancestors, they *have* had to go to Virginia as well as New Hampshire to see them both. Each child has a Southern ancestor as well as a Northern one; and he don't like to have curses heaped on the head of the parent or the grand-parent.

Then again when you come to talk to us about a dissolution of the Union, we tell you "No! Never." We trade southward as well as northward. We furnish the water that floats down the Mississippi as well as the water that flows through the lakes of the St. Lawrence. We intend to follow that water wherever it flows until it mingles into the broad ocean. We have social and commercial relations with the South and the East alike. We have the tie of country and of blood that binds them together. When you tell us that this Union is to be dissolved we say "Never!" for the reason that we never intend to travel into a foreign country, and obtain a passport and have it *visèd* by a consul in order to visit the tombs of our fathers or the scenes of our childhood. Hence there is not a man on the frontier that don't love this glorious Union; and because we do love the Union our motto is never to do an act that would alienate one portion of the people from another. You can only preserve the Union by maintaining peace and harmony and concord among the people of the different sections.—Remember that one tie after another has already been severed. This fell spirit of sectional strife has invaded the holy sanctuary, and separated the churches into churches North, churches South. This fell spirit of sectional strife has separated brethren at the communion table. And when you find a spirit of strife so deadly that it can sever social tie, and religious tie, and political tie, what is your Constitution worth, when you have made the people enemies who live under it? You must bind the hearts of this people together, if you expect to maintain the Union. You can only bind those hearts together, and mould them into one, by observing those great principles of justice and equity upon which our whole system rests. (Cheers.)

My friends, I feel that I have done injustice to you as well as to myself. ("Go on.") No,

I am not going on. I have done more talking to-day than I expected to have done all summer. I thought I was going to pass quietly through, but every road station was so crowded that my friends were literally overwhelming me with kindness; and it was not in my heart to refuse to respond to them. I made no political speeches because I was welcomed unanimously by all parties; and it never was in my heart to say an unkind thing to those that were kind to me. To-day, I have only touched on these political topics because your chairman, who introduced me, invited my special attention to them. I do not intend as a general thing to enter into the political discussions of this year. It is the first time in twenty-seven years that I have looked on at a political fight without taking a hand in it. I am now enjoying a holiday visiting the watering places for the first time, taking a little recreation, and, it seems, speaking a little just for exercise. But, gentlemen, I must again seriously, and with profound gratitude, express to you my thanks for the manner in which you have received me this day. It certainly is a magnificent and imposing demonstration—one that I feel that I have a right to be proud of, and one that reflects credit and honor upon you who have got it up. I do not accept it as a personal tribute to myself. I believe, and may rejoice in the belief, that it is intended as a forcible manner of expressing your devotion to those great political principles with which my public life is identified. (Long and prolonged applause.)

SPEECH OF

HON. HERSCHEL V. JOHNSON,

Mr. Johnson, in reply to the Committee who informed him of his nomination for Vice President, spoke as follows, after referring to the circumstances under which it was tendered:

The National Democratic party is in a peculiar condition. It is assailed in the house of its professed friends, and threatened with overthrow. The country is in a peculiar condition. It is on the eve of a sectional conflict which may sweep down all political parties and terminate in a dissolution of the Union. It is the duty of patriots and statesmen to unite in averting these threatened calamities.

It may not be inappropriate to refer to the circumstances which imperil the National Democracy. The Alabama delegation went to the Convention at Charleston instructed to demand the incorporation into the platform of the party, the proposition that Congress should intervene for the protection of slaves in the territories, and to withdraw if the demand should be refused. It was refused, and, I think, properly refused. That delegation did retire, and with them a large portion of the delegates from the Cotton States. Why should they have retired? The record shows that if they had remained at their post they had the power to have prevented the nomination of any candidate who might be obnoxious to the South. Thus reduced by secessions the Convention adjourned to Baltimore, and requested the States to fill the vacancies in their respective delegations. The Convention re-assembled on the 18th instant. The seceding delegations were returned, some accredited to Richmond and others to Baltimore, by the way of Richmond, and instructed to make the same demand and to withdraw if it should be refused. Delegates were appointed in Louisiana, Alabama and Georgia, by the National Democrats of those States, to fill the vacant seats of the seceders. Those of Alabama and Louisiana were admitted, and the seceding delegations rejected, and the seceding delegates from Georgia were admitted to seats. They all took umbrage at the decision of the Convention, touching the various contests for seats.

They retired, organized and nominated candidates for the Presidency and Vice Presidency, and they claim to be the "National Democracy of the United States." Now, if they were

actuated by "principle," if it was their purpose, in good faith, to obtain the recognition of the principle of Congressional protection for slavery in the Territories, why did they not wait until a proper time arrived to bring that subject before the Convention, and then according to their instructions withdraw from the body? The reason is palpable; they were waging war against a distinguished man, not "for" the maintenance of the "principle;" they were willing to jeopard the integrity of the Democratic party and the triumphs of its cherished principles, rather than see its will proclaimed in the nomination of its favorite.

Admitting for the sake of argument Mr Douglas to be as obnoxious as they allege he is, yet there never was a time when the South united could not have defeated his nomination. Why then should they have seceded? Why not remain at their post? Why seek to dismember and destroy the party? I question not the patriotism of any, but the people will hold them responsible sooner or later for all the ills that may flow from their errors.

I said the demand for Congressional intervention was properly rejected at Charleston. And why do I say so? Because it was the agreement between the North and South that the slavery agitation should be removed from the halls of Congress, and the people of the Territories be left perfectly free to regulate their domestic institutions in their own way, subject to the Constitution of the United States. This was the principle of the compromise measures of 1850, and practically applied in the Kansas Nebraska act in 1854. It was adopted by both of the great political parties of the United States in 1852. It triumphed in the election of Franklin Pierce in that year and of James Buchanan in 1856. It is perhaps the best ground of compromise between the North and the South which human ingenuity can devise, and by it the Democratic party at least of all sections should be willing to abide. It gives advantage to neither section over the other, because it refers all questions of dispute between them, either as to Congressional or Territorial power over the subject of slavery, to the final arbitrament of the Supreme Court of the United States. It is therefore safe for the South. Its practical working is not without satisfactory results. Where the people of a Territory desire slave labor, and the soil and climate are suited to it, slavery will go—where these conditions do not exist, it will not go. This finds an illustration in New Mexico where slavery is established, and that in those Territories where it is excluded. Only a few days ago propositions to repeal the slavery laws of New Mexico were made and rejected on the one hand, and a proposition to repeal the anti-slavery law of Kansas on the other was made and rejected in the Senate. Suppose these propositions, or either of them, had prevailed, is it not certain the country would have been thrown into the highest excitement? but by their rejection non-intervention was practically adhered to and the public mind is satisfied and quiet. Let us maintain it firmly and faithfully. We are bound to it by every consideration of interest and obligation of compact. Its abandonment will prove fatal to the National Democratic party and ultimately to the Union itself. It will drive the South into intense sectionalism and the North into the ranks of Black Republicanism. I do not say every man of the North, for I know that the great body of the Northern Democracy will remain true to the Constitution, despite the overwhelming flood of its relentless cohorts. But I mean that the free labor States would be controlled by Black Republicanism and would not be able to return a single member to either House of Congress friendly to the Constitutional rights of the South. I trust that such a condition of things may never exist, but if it should, I know of no way by which the Union can be saved.

Hence the doctrine of Congressional intervention as advocated by this new-born sectional party is fraught with peril to the country. The question is now distinctly presented to the people whether they will adhere to the doctrine of non-intervention, or whether they will abandon it; whether they will re-open the slavery agitation by requiring Congress to take jurisdiction over it, or whether they will give repose to the public mind and security to the Union by leaving it where the compromise leaves it—to the free action of the people under the Territories and the Constitution of the United States. The issue is fairly made up. It is intervention or non-intervention. Its decision involves the destiny of this great Republic, and the highest interest of the civilized world.

Compared with it the aspirations of men and the fate of political parties sink into utter insignificance. Where shall we look for deliverance from these threatened evils? It has been the mission of the Democratic party of the Union in a thousand perils to rescue our country from impending calamities. Its past career abounds with heroic passages and is illustrated with the most glorious achievements in the cause of constitutional liberty. It is the party of Jefferson and Madison, and Jackson and Polk, whose administrations constitute grand epochs in our national history. It is the party of the Constitution, and I look to it with confidence. Where else shall the patriot look in these times of political defection and sectional agitation? Let its integrity be permanently destroyed, and the doctrine of non-intervention overthrown, and the best hopes of the statesman may well be clouded with gloom and darkness.

It is to maintain these that I consent to take the position now assigned me, and welcome the consequences of personal good or personal ill which that position may bring. Nothing else could induce me to brave the detraction which it invites and incur the heavy responsibility which it imposes.